



DIOCESE OF FORT WAYNE – SOUTH BEND

915 South Clinton Street · Post Office Box 390
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801

March 17, 2020

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend,

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, I write to encourage you, in the words of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, “to live this difficult moment with the strength of the faith, the certainty of hope and the ardor of charity.”

Like many other dioceses throughout our country and world, I have made the difficult decision, along with the other bishops of Indiana, to suspend the celebration of public Masses in our diocese due to the escalation of the virus and to help prevent its spread. This suspension begins on Wednesday, March 18th and will remain in effect until further notice.

Not being able to attend Mass is very difficult spiritually since the Holy Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” As Catholics, we must do our part to help protect those who could be infected by the virus at public gatherings.

Please know that I and our priests will be praying fervently for you at our daily private celebrations of Mass. I encourage you to make an act of “spiritual communion,” especially on Sundays. Saint Thomas Aquinas defined “spiritual communion” as “an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament and a loving embrace as though we had already received Him.” You can use the following prayer from Saint Alphonsus Liguori to make a “spiritual communion”:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least into my heart. I embrace You as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

Saint Teresa of Avila wrote: “When you cannot receive Communion and cannot attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you.”

I encourage you during this time to watch Holy Mass on television or the online Masses being live-streamed from many of our parishes, including a live-streamed Mass that I will be celebrating every Sunday at 10:00 AM. I also encourage you to reflect on

the Sunday readings and to take time for personal and family prayer by reciting together the holy rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet or the Stations of the Cross.

As members of the Body of Christ, let us be united in our prayers for one another and especially for those here or abroad who are suffering from illness or have died from the virus infection. Let us also remember in our prayers the valiant doctors, nurses and other health care workers who are working hard to bring healing to the sick as well as our priests and pastoral workers who are providing sacramental and pastoral care to the sick and dying.

In this time of “social isolation,” let us not be isolated in our hearts from those who need our love, care and compassion. I am very edified by so many of our faithful who are bringing food to the elderly and staying in contact with those who may feel lonely, anxious, or depressed during this time. Thank you to all who are doing corporal and spiritual works of mercy in this Lenten season and offering assistance to those in need during this pandemic.

Jesus invites us, His disciples, to follow Him by taking up the cross. Not being able to attend Mass is a heavy cross, but one that we can carry with the help of the Lord. We are united in spirit with our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are also unable to attend Mass because of the pandemic and also with those who regularly cannot go to Mass because of sickness, persecution or a shortage of priests. I hope and pray that this experience will deepen everyone’s desire to receive our Lord in the Eucharist, the great gift that we can too often take for granted.

Finally, let us implore our Blessed Mother, as the patroness of our diocese under the title of the Immaculate Conception, as well as Saint Matthew, our secondary patron, to intercede for us during this trial. Let us remember that Jesus is always with us and nothing can separate us from His love. Let us live in His love and spread His love in our community. May God bless you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Kevin C. Rhoades

Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend